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Unitarianism explained and defended,

IN A

DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED IN THE

CHURCH OF THE UNIVERSALISTS,
AT PHILADELPHIA, 1796.

BY JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, LL.D. F.R.S.

Ec. Ec.

That they might know thee, the only true God, and
Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.

JOHN. xvii. 3.

To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are
all things.

1 COR. viii. 6.

By evil report and good report; as deceivers and yet
true.

2 COR. vi. 8.

PHILADELPHIA,
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1796.

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THE PREFACE.

HAVING concluded my *Discourses on the Evidences of Revealed Religion* with an *Address to the Congregation*, by way of preparation for *this*, which I have also been requested to publish, it will not be improper to insert it here.

“ I have now completed the series of Discourses which I proposed to deliver on the *Evidences of Revealed Religion*, and at the request of many of my hearers, they will very soon be published. In the two first of the discourses and the present, I have endeavoured to shew, what is the real *use* and genuine *spirit*, of this religion, and therefore why it is of so much importance as to be worth contending for. But it will be said by unbelievers, that Christians are much divided among themselves. To what sect must we be converted? I answer, that all the sects of Christians, numerous as they are, are agreed with respect to every thing that is really fundamental, and that has any great influence on the tempers and conduct of men.

“ They all agree in the belief of the being, the providence, and the righteous moral government of God, in the divine mission of Moses and the prophets, of Christ and the apostles, and also in the authority of the scriptures of the Old and



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New Testaments ; and, what is of more consequence than these, and to which these articles of faith are themselves subservient, they all believe in a state of righteous retribution after death. To whatever denomination of Christians, therefore, those who are, or have been, unbelievers, may chuse to join themselves, or whether they think proper to join no existing sect at all, but form a new division of themselves, I receive them as brethren. They are possessed of the great means and motives of virtue here, and if these have their due influence upon their dispositions and conduct, they will be happy hereafter.

“ But many Christians, who ought to know better, are much alarmed at the idea of great danger from the spread of certain opinions, especially those of the unitarians, with whom it is known that I class myself. I therefore think it may not be improper (and I know it to be the wish of many persons) if I give you one discourse on that subject. And I am willing to hope that, if it be heard with candour, without which no true judgment can be formed of any thing, the consequence will be that, whatever may be thought of the *truth* or *erroneousness* of the doctrine, what I shall observe may be the means of lessening the horror that some worthy persons have conceived of it, and of promoting that mutual candour among Christians of different denominations, the want of which is one of the principal objections to the whole scheme, with many unbelievers, who, without considering

THE PREFACE.

what christianity itself is, judge of it by the effect that it has on those who profess it, and who are more particularly shocked at the animosity which some Christians entertain for others. This discourse, therefore, will not be without some relation to the defence of christianity, in recommending it to the acceptance of unbelievers; and if it produce, in any measure, this most desirable effect, it will be the most proper close to all the discourses that I have delivered, though it will not be printed with them."

The former discourses I have printed separately, that those persons who wish to peruse them, may have an opportunity of doing it without having any thing that would be offensive to them obtruded upon them at the same time. Except what I have advanced concerning the doctrine of a *soul*, those discourses contain nothing that can give offence to any Christians, let their peculiar opinions be what they will; and if I have not been misinformed, even what I observed on that subject did not prove to be so offensive as I had apprehended. Indeed, the firm belief of the doctrine of a *resurrection* must, with the truly considerate, make any difference of opinion which can only affect the doctrine of an *intermediate state* of little consequence.

In general, unitarians have a particular claim to the candour of their fellow Christians, as their devotional services are such as any other Christians may join in. But it necessarily hap-

pens that they cannot conscientiously join in the devotions of others, who, believing both Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, to be, each of them, possessed of all divine attributes, as well as the Father, make them (as, to be consistent with themselves, they ought to do) equally the objects of their worship. This unitarians necessarily consider as *idolatry*, as much as the worship of the virgin Mary, or any other saints in the Popish calendar. In consequence of this, unitarians are often much embarrassed, and when they are few in number, their case is deserving particular consideration.

I shall probably be asked, what is to be done by conscientious unitarians, who, as such, cannot join in trinitarian worship; but who as Christians would not forsake *the assembling themselves together* for the purpose of public worship, who are yet without a regular or learned minister, and have not the means of procuring one? I answer, the same that the primitive Christians did when they were in the same situation. They formed themselves into societies for prayer, reading the scriptures, and mutual exhortation, and with far less advantage than unitarians are now possessed of.

It is, in reality, nothing else than *superstition* that has made *regular ministers*, as they are called, so necessary as they are now become; there being nothing that is done by them that may not be done, and with as much effect, without them. It will at this day be readily

admitted, that there are no peculiar powers conferred by ordination, or any peculiar sanctity in the character of ministers. Christian ministers become so by the choice of the people to whom they officiate, and like other *servants*, they cease to be ministers when they think proper to dismiss them. And, without the assistance of any person of learning and ability to compose sermons or prayers, they will find helps for this purpose abundantly sufficient for the occasions of any society whatever, and superior to any that myself, or any other person, could undertake to supply them with. The best that I could compose for the use of unitarian congregations are already before the public, and there are various excellent *liturgies* for those who prefer that mode of worship.

My advice, therefore, would be that, for the present, the unitarians in this city should form themselves into societies, though in small numbers. Let a few persons, who, as in primitive times, may be called *elders*, be chosen to direct their affairs; let them meet every Lord's day for public worship, when any compositions approved by the society may be read, and baptism and the Lord's supper administered.

Hereafter these societies may be united under a regular minister, which will, no doubt, be more respectable, and more advantageous to the common cause; when a proper place of worship may be provided for them. But by no means let the important object of *publicworship*,

and the holding up to the view of the world christian and unitarian principles, be abandoned, or long suspended, for want of such a convenience.

The opinion and practice of individuals in private life have little effect for want of *notoriety*; but *a church*, and a place of public worship, known to all, and open to all who choose to attend it, is like *a city that is set on a hill*, that *cannot be hid*. By joining such churches, or assemblies, we likewise make that *open profession* of our principles which the gospel requires of us. Let those, then, who have a just zeal for their christian and unitarian principles confer together, and it may please God that a small beginning may lead to a great and valuable end. They will, at least, have done their duty, and may with more satisfaction acquiesce in whatever the sovereign and wise disposer of all things shall determine with respect to the final issue.

I shall take this opportunity of observing, that the superstitious idea of the necessity of ordained ministers to christian congregations is of great prejudice in those parts of this country, in which, at the first forming of a settlement, there are not families enow to maintain a minister. For without stated meetings for reading the scriptures and public worship, there is great danger not only that all sense, but that all knowledge, of religion will in time be obliterated. But this may easily be prevented by the method that is here proposed.

A

DISCOURSE,

&c. &c.

Some said, What will this babbler say? He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods, because he preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him, and brought him to Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is. For thou bringest strange things to our ears. We would know therefore what these things mean.

ACTS xvii. 18--20.

MY CHRISTIAN FRIENDS,

MY situation in this country, excluded on my arrival in it, from almost every pulpit*, as if I was suspected of holding, and of being disposed to propagate, some strange and mischievous doctrine, so strongly brought to my mind the similar situation of Paul at Athens, that I intended, if ever I should have an opportunity of addressing

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myself

* I was, however desired to preach at Princeton.

myself to any of its inhabitants (an opportunity which the liberality of this congregation has now given me, and which would have been given me at that time, if this place had then been ready) to address them from that part of the gospel history which I have now recited. The case being new to me, I could not help suspecting, either that I was not in a christian country, or that I was not considered as a Christian in it. For let Christians differ ever so much from one another, they have many things and those of the greatest importance, in common, and on these common topics, it is certainly very possible for any christian minister, to address a christian audience to their mutual edification.

Not doubting, however, but that I was among Christians, for I attended public worship in various places, and found it to be christian, I necessarily concluded, that I was not myself considered as a Christian, or one that was deserving of the name; and as I flattered myself that this idea of me arose from some misconception of my

my principles, I thought it might not be improper, to take some opportunity to give an explicit account of them. I therefore now consider myself as in the situation of Paul before the council of Areopagus at Athens, called upon to give an account of the *strange doctrines* that I hold.

To the people of this country I must suppose that, like Paul, I have been represented either as a *setter forth of strange gods*, or some strange and dangerous doctrine concerning God. For nothing short of this can account for the treatment that I met with. But, in reality, like Paul I only preach *Jesus and the resurrection*; this rightly explained, having ever been the sum and substance of all my preaching, maintaining the divine mission of Jesus, or his authority from God to instruct mankind, and especially to teach, and in his own person exemplify, the great doctrine of a resurrection from the dead, and a state of righteous retribution after death. Of this I hope I have given sufficient evidence in the discourses I have already delivered.

What

What are the great principles of all religion, as far as it can influence *practice* (in which respect alone it is of any real use and importance to rational beings, and members of civil society) but the doctrines concerning God, his attributes, his providence, and a future state, concerning our duty in this life, and our expectations in another? And why is revelation of more advantage than mere natural religion, as I have already shewn that it is, and therefore a blessing to mankind, but as it teaches the doctrines concerning these interesting subjects in a clearer manner, and with more satisfactory evidence?

Whatever *nature* may be supposed to have taught, it is a fact, that without *revelation* mankind were universally idolaters, worshipping a multiplicity of gods, and by means of rites highly injurious to morality, some of them abominably impure, and others shockingly cruel; and their notions concerning a future state were never such as could be of much use
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to the cause of virtue. With this light of nature they were likewise miserably bewildered, and misled by various superstitious practices, such as those of divination, magic and necromancy, arising from their ignorance of the laws of nature, and of the true causes of events.

Infinitely are mankind indebted to revelation for delivering them from their servile bondage to these superstitions, informing them concerning the unity of the divine nature, the creation of the universe by one intelligent Being, and his constant providence, extending to all events, together with his fixed purpose to reward virtue, and punish vice, if not in this world, surely in another. But especially are we indebted to christianity, as the means of *bringing life and immortality to light*; teaching us to look above and beyond this world, to consider ourselves as pilgrims and strangers here, and as *citizens of heaven*, where it, therefore, behoves us to have our treasure, our hearts, and our conversation.

When

When this was done for mankind, what more remained to be done, but to make these great subjects familiar to the mind, by frequent exhibitions, and happy illustrations. To illustrate the scriptures, in which these great and practical truths are conveyed to us, to unfold the various duties of man with respect to God, his neighbour, and himself (which requires some knowledge of human nature and human life, as well as of the scriptures) and to enforce the observance of them by proper motives, is the great business of a christian minister; and such has been the usual strain of my preaching to the age to which I am now arrived; and such I may therefore venture to say, would be the usual strain of my preaching, were I to resume the employment,

At the same time, however, I acknowledge that there are religious truths, though not of primary, yet of secondary, and of considerable, importance, on which, for various reasons, I have thought it my duty not to be silent, especially in an age
abound-

abounding with unbelievers. Christianity, besides being proved to be true, and indeed, as a necessary step in the proof of its truth, must be shewn to be *rational*, such as men of good sense can receive without abandoning the use of their reason, or making a sacrifice of it to what is called *faith*. The author of our religion required no such sacrifice. He required of his disciples, that they should both *hear and understand* (Mark vii. 14.) what he delivered, which implies that he taught nothing that they were not capable of understanding, and which it was not their duty to endeavour to understand.

But many doctrines have been taught under the name of christianity, which it is not pretended that men can ever understand. Against all such doctrines, the offspring of ignorance, or artifice, it is the duty of every intelligent Christian to enter his protest, as the bane of genuine christianity, and what is in danger of bringing it into universal discredit. They are as a mill-

a millstone about its neck, and unless detached from it must inevitably sink it.

Permit me then, thus called upon by the circumstances in which I find myself, to mention with perfect ingenuouſneſs thoſe doctrines, which I have ſeen reaſon to reject from the creed of Chriſtians, as having been introduced into chriſtianity, from heathen religions, and heathen philoſophy, and which I conceive to be the *tares* which our Lord foretold would be ſown, by an adverſary among his good ſeed. Theſe, however, having been now of long ſtanding, are retained with peculiar obſtinacy, by the bulk of profeſſing Chriſtians; ſo that they who reject them, and adhere to what they conceive to be the ſimple and genuine goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt, are treated as enemies of the goſpel, and are the objects of general ſuſpicion and alarm. But in the ſame light appeared Luther, Calvin, and many others, who, becauſe their ſentiments are now generally approved, have obtained the honourable ap-

appellation of *Reformers*; and therefore this circumstance, which, if what we preach be the truth, will only be temporary, should not discourage *us* any more than it did *them*. It is only *time* that is requisite to establish every reformation. Nothing can be more depended upon, than that whatever is *true*, or *right*, will in due time prevail, and establish itself, notwithstanding all possible opposition.

You may ask, if the doctrines that I allude to do not belong to the gospel; how came they to be considered in that light, and to have kept their place so long in the christian church. But I may ask, how was polytheism introduced, into the world after the institution of a purer religion by Noah, Abraham, and Moses; and how were the errors and abuses of popery introduced into the pure gospel of Christ. It is part of the unsearchable mystery of providence to permit the introduction, and even the long continuance, of many *evils*, though no doubt for the sake of the *good*, that will ultimately be

be more firmly established by their means. And in due time God never fails to raise up men of superior wisdom and spirit to revive lost truth, and to restore his true worship. Thus Paul says, Acts xvii. 30. at the time of heathen ignorance *God winked*, but then *commanded all men every where to repent*. So also at the time of christian ignorance and darkness, God long winked; but by means of various reformers he has begun to call on the christian world to repent of their manifold corruptions of the holy religion, delivered to them by his son Jesus. And permit me to add, he now commands with a voice that will be heard. Reason and scripture equally enforce the command.

What, then, you ask, is the principal of what I deem to be those corruptions and abuses of the gospel, which were left untouched at the period which we call *the reformation*, but which so greatly disfigure the gospel, and endangers its very existence, by promoting infidelity. I answer that the first and greatest of these corruptions is the idolatrous *worship of*
Jesus

Jesus Christ, as God equal to the Father. This is a direct violation of the first and greatest of the ten commandments, *Exod. xx. 2. Thou shalt have no other gods besides me.* Now who was the speaker in this case? Certainly *one person*, whoever he was, and not *two*, or *more*. For then the phrase would have been *besides us*, and therefore the admitting of any other person to equal honours with this one great Being must be *idolatry*. If this one Being was the Father, the maker of all things, as, no doubt, it was, *he* is the sole object of religious worship, and not Christ, any more than Moses, or any other person, or being, whatever. If, as some suppose, it was Christ who spake from mount Sinai, we ought not to worship the Father, and in this the Moravians are consistent. For they address all their prayers to Christ. The followers of Swedenborg also, considering Christ as the one only God, reject with indignation the doctrine of a proper trinity and their worship is uniformly conducted on that principle.

Three

There is no subject on which the scriptures are so clear and emphatical as they are on this. The worship of one God, and that one God the maker of all things, stiled in the New Testament and by our Saviour himself *his God and father*, John xx. 17. was the one great object of the whole Jewish dispensation. The Hebrew nation was chosen, and set apart from the rest of the world, on purpose to be the repository of this great truth, while all other nations were sunk into idolatry, and the corrupt practices universally connected with it. The doctrine of the strict unity of God was considered as the most fundamental principle of all religion by the whole body of the Jews in our Saviour's time. They were then entirely free from idolatry, and dreaded the worship of any other Being than one; and by means of prophets of the Jewish nation, will the worship of the one true God be restored over the whole world.

But as mankind have always shewn a propensity to the worship of a multiplicity
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of deities, imagining that the powers of one Being were not equal to every thing that required the attention of divinity, and as the Jews themselves, though taught of God, fell into the idolatrous worship of their neighbours, so the Christians, though they were taught the same doctrine by Christ and the apostles, yet being corrupted by heathen principles, gradually adopted the worship of many beings, beginning naturally enough, with Christ, whose person, as thereby less disgraceful to themselves, they wished to magnify. But not stopping there, they proceeded to the worship of the Virgin Mary and of so many other saints and angels, as makes their catalogue of deities (for such the objects of prayer necessarily are) as numerous as that of any of the heathens. This practice had also the same effect with them as with the heathens, in withdrawing their regards from the one God and Father of all, and thus reducing him to a mere cypher in the universe. For the zealous catholics hardly ever address any prayer to

to the Father, and indeed not many to Christ, but chiefly to the Virgin Mary, or some other inferior saint, to whom they particularly devote themselves.

To defend the doctrine of the trinity on the pretence that *three divine persons* make no more than *one God*, is just as absurd as to say that three human persons may make no more than one man. If each of these persons had only a part of the attributes of divinity, as the *reason*, the *memory*, and the *will* (to which they are sometimes compared) constitute the thinking part of man, the three might compose but one God. But while the *Father*, the *Son* and the *Holy Spirit*, separately considered, are each of them maintained to be true and very God, without the least deficiency of any one attribute of divinity, they cannot, in common sense, or common arithmetic, make less than three Gods.

To defend the doctrine of the trinity on the literal interpretation of any particular passages of scripture, is no better than

than to defend the doctrine of transubstantiation in the same way. For the sacramental bread is expressly said to be the body of Christ, and the wine his blood. But the understanding of man is, and must be, the interpreter of scripture; and, as in other writings, one part must not be construed so as to be inconsistent with another; and in this respect there is no more difficulty in the interpretation of the scriptures than of any other writings, if prejudice be out of the question.

When our Saviour says, again and again, (John v. 19.) *that of himself he could do nothing, but that the father within him did the works*, (John xiv. 10.) meaning his miracles; that his disciples were *one with him, as he was one with the Father*, John xvii. 11. *that he did not know the time of the day of judgment, but the Father only*, Mark. xiii. 32. when, after his resurrection and ascension, he is stiled by the apostle Peter (evidently speaking of him in the highest terms) (Acts ii. 21.) *a man approved of*
God,

God, by signs and wonders, which God did by him, and whom God raised from the dead; when the apostle Paul so explicitly says *To us* (1 Cor. viii. 6. 1 Tim. ii. 5.) *there is one God, the Father, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*, and when all the sacred writers uniformly speak of God, and Christ, as distinct persons, and the latter always as subordinate to the former; surely we should not, from any construction of a few passages of scripture, deduce a doctrine contrary to this, but interpret obscure passages by plainer ones, and the general sense of the whole. But there is no real difficulty in the interpretation of any of those passages of scripture which have been supposed to favour the doctrine of the trinity, as I have shewn in various publications, especially one that has been re-printed in this country, intitled *A familiar Illustration of passages of scripture relating to this subject*, as well as some others.

In what manner, and by what steps, the christian world, beginning with the
worship

worship of God the Father only, came to consider Christ as God, and how they proceeded afterwards to the worship of the Virgin Mary, and other saints, I have explained at large in my *History of the Corruptions of Christianity, and of early Opinions concerning Jesus Christ.*

It will be said there is danger in lessening the personal dignity of Christ, and that if he be not God, he cannot be an all sufficient saviour. But is there not danger, on the other hand, in taking from the one God, and Father of all, the honours that are peculiar to him, and which he has expressly declared he will not give to any other? Was Moses an insufficient saviour, or deliverer (for so he is called, with respect to the Israelites) because he was not God? Did not both he and Jesus execute the commissions, on which they were respectively sent, and thereby fully answer the ends of them? It is God alone that, in both the cases, was the proper saviour. He was the saviour of the Israelites from the Egyptian bondage by the instrumentality of Moses, and it is

he also who saves us from sin and death by the gospel of Christ, which is therefore called *the doctrine of God our saviour*. Supposing the Jews, out of reverence for Moses, had paid *him* divine honours before or after his death, would they not have been guilty of idolatry, as much as if they had worshipped Baal? If therefore, Christ was in himself a man, or any created being whatever, it is no less idolatry and impiety to worship him.

Another doctrine highly injurious to God, and which cannot have any favourable effect on those who propose to imitate him, and what in a great measure flowed from the doctrine of the trinity, is that of *atonement*, which supposes that God cannot forgive sins without satisfaction being made to his offended justice by the death of Christ; when the uniform and plain language of scripture represents him as forgiving sins *freely*, and requiring no satisfaction whatever, besides the repentance and reformation of the sinner.

The first and most solemn declaration of the divine character to Moses (Exod.

xxxiv. 6.) is that of God *merciful and gracious, long suffering, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin.* David constantly prays for the pardon of sin for *his mercy's sake*, Pf. xlv. 26. and *his name's sake*. Pf. xxv. 11. not for the sake of Christ, or the Messiah; and our Saviour, in his various discourses and parables, never represents him in any other light. What satisfaction did the father of the prodigal son require but his return to his duty? Did he not, even when his son was a great way off, run to meet him, fall upon his neck, and kiss him? Did not the master of the servant who owed him a thousand talents, forgive him *freely*, only *because he intreated him*? Matt. xviii. 32.

Besides, as the famous Mr. Penn, the founder of this colony, in his excellent treatise, entitled, *The sandy foundation shaken*, observed, if the justice of God the Father required satisfaction, did not that of God the Son require an equal one, and what satisfaction was made to *him*? and it is absurd to suppose that he made it to himself; for then God the Father might have done the same.

The original doctrine of *satisfaction*, after this term began to be considered as something more than a figure of speech, was more rational than that which obtains at present. It being considered that by means of sin men were in the power of the devil, from which they were to be delivered, or redeemed, God gave to him the price of their redemption, in the death of his son. This was the doctrine which generally prevailed till the time of the celebrated Austin, who also held it. It was not till after this time that the generality of Christians considered the price of man's redemption as paid to God the Father by the Son. But the only rational doctrine on the subject is that Christ died a *sacrifice* only in the figurative sense of the word, as men are said to sacrifice their lives in any cause, in which they expose themselves to certain death.

By the rules of the gospel we are required to forgive others, as we ourselves hope to be forgiven, that is, we are to conform to the rule of the divine conduct in our behaviour towards our offending brethren.

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Consequently the maxims of his conduct are no other than those of ours. But are *we* to require satisfaction of an offending brother? By no means. Our Saviour himself says, (Luke xvii. 3.) that, if *he repent*, though the offence be repeated ever so often, we must forgive him. Surely then, this doctrine of atonement implies the greatest reflection on the character and conduct of almighty God, and sinks it below that of a man.

There are other doctrines which have been engrafted on christianity, but they are so exceedingly discordant to it, that, though the greatest stress was formerly laid upon them, as much as is now laid on the doctrines of the trinity and atonement, they begin to be discarded by protestants. I mean the doctrines of original sin and predestination, which imply that man has not naturally the power of doing what God requires of him, which of course represents him as the most unreasonable and unjust of all beings, expecting to *reap where he has not sowed*, and without any regard to character, arbitrarily destining some to everlasting happiness, and others to everlasting

lasting destruction, which it shall never be in their power to avoid. The mere mention of such things is enough, one would think, to fill any reasonable beings with horror. Can we wonder that christianity is rejected when such doctrines as these are supposed to belong to it?

It is, indeed, high time to *cry aloud and not spare*, when doctrines so absurd as those which I have recited are publicly preached, and insisted upon, as essential parts of the Christian religion. There is no saving the tree, without cutting off these vile excrescences. But this being done, the evidences of revealed religion will challenge the closest investigation. It stands upon a rock, and the gates of death shall not prevail against it. But some would place its foundation upon the sand, and this gave Mr. Penn the hint of calling that excellent tract, in which he refuted those doctrines, "*The sandy foundation shaken.*" Being, however, put into prison for this meritorious work, he acted a part unworthy of christian firmness, by explaining away his meaning, in another piece entitled,

Innocence

Innocence with its open face, in order to obtain his liberty. Let us follow the example of this great man in freely investigating the doctrines of the gospel, and imparting to others whatever light we are able to procure for ourselves; but let us not copy him in his weakness, influenced by the fear of many, in a case which respects God and conscience.

Think not that, in objecting to the opinions of certain classes of Christians, I divest myself of christian charity. True charity consists in wishing well to all persons, in doing them every kind office in our power, and thinking as well of them as we can. And certainly the greatest errors in judgment are consistent with the best dispositions, and consequently with the most perfect acceptableness with God, who looks only to the heart, and to the opportunities which he has afforded to every man for the discovery of truth.

A love of truth is an essential part of a good moral character, and consequently an earnest endeavour to divest ourselves of every prejudice in our search after it.

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They, therefore, who are either negligent in their own inquiries, or who in any degree persecute others, on account of their difference of opinion, are highly censurable. But such is the force of prejudice, especially in favour of opinions in the belief of which men have been educated, and which they have long held sacred, that the greatest allowance is to be made even for their undue attachment to them, and for every natural consequence of that attachment. At the same time, therefore, that I regard with horror such doctrines as those of transubstantiation, the trinity, atonement, and other corruptions of christianity, (the purity of which it must be allowed we all ought to have at heart) I regard the *men* who hold them with the greatest respect, and I entertain for them the greatest good will. Though they differ so much from me, they may be greatly my superiors both in understanding and in piety. This, however, is no reason why I may not believe that, in consequence of my own researches after truth, I see the errors into which they have been led. As
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the best of men have their failings, which others ought to avoid, the wisest of men may have their errors, which their inferiors ought not to copy.

Christians may respect and love one another though they cannot worship together. For certainly no unitarian can conscientiously join in worship with trinitarians; since they have not the same object of worship. A trinitarian may join in worship with me, because the Being to whom I address myself in prayer he allows to be God, and that I ascribe to him no more than he believes to be his due. But I cannot join in prayer to Christ as God, if I do not believe him to be God. On the contrary, zealous as I ought to be for the honour of the one true God, I ought to be filled with horror at the impiety of it. A trinitarian, however, is not only justified in his adoration of Christ, but under a natural obligation so to do; because, being in his idea, in all respects equal to the Father, he must be entitled to the same adoration with the Father himself, and it is injustice to him to withhold it from him.

him. We are to worship and bow down before the Lord *our maker*. If Christ, then be the Lord our maker, we ought to worship and bow down before *him*.

Unitarians, therefore, ought by all means to have places of worship peculiar to themselves. They ought to come out of a corrupt and idolatrous church, and be separate. Indeed, by this means only will it appear to the world that christians are not universally idolaters, and that our religion is not that system of absurdity and impiety which unbelievers think themselves authorized to reject without examination. This is a duty which we owe to religion, and to mankind, whom we ought to instruct by every means in our power, by example, as well as by precept.

This is the only method of drawing due *attention* to any set of important principles, and of promoting that enquiry, and free discussion, which is favourable to the propagation of truth. For other sects of christians, having the same zeal for their peculiar principles, will naturally preach, and write, in defence of them; and the
world

world at large will thereby have an opportunity of judging, by comparing the arguments on both sides, and considering the temper with which they are urged, which are more just, and more truly christian. And happily, in this free country, where the state does not interfere with matters of religion, free discussion may be expected to produce its natural effect, and consequently that whatever shall appear to be true, will finally prevail, and establish itself, notwithstanding all the opposition it may meet with.

May the *God of truth* lead us into all truth.

Having given this account of my faith with respect to articles of the greatest secondary importance, I shall take the liberty (especially as I have been indulged with an opportunity of pleading what I believe to be the cause of truth in this place) to express my concurrence with the minister, and the congregation worshipping here, in their opinion concerning the final happiness of all the human race, a doctrine eminently calculated to promote alike gratitude

titude to God, and benevolence to man, and consequently every other virtue; and since this doctrine is perfectly consistent with the belief of the adequate punishment of all sin, it is far from giving any encouragement to sinners.

The doctrine of *eternal torments* is altogether indefensible on any principles of justice or equity; for all the crimes of finite creatures, being of course finite, cannot in equity deserve infinite punishment. The Judge of all the earth, who appeals to men that *all his ways are equal*, we may rest assured, will do that which is *right*. Nay, *in the midst of judgment he ever remembers mercy*, and he has declared, that *he retaineth not anger for ever*.

But I do not lay much stress on particular texts of scripture in this case, because it does not appear to me to have been the proper object of the mission of Christ, or of any other prophet, to announce this doctrine, nor does it appear that any of them considered the subject in its full extent. But it may be inferred from the general maxims of God's moral government, and from the

the spirit and tendency of the whole system of revelation. Since all the dead are to be raised, the wicked as well as the righteous, it is highly improbable that this will be merely for the sake of their being punished, and then consigned to annihilation, as if they were incapable of improvement.

No human beings can be so depraved as that it shall not be in the power of proper discipline to reclaim them, so as to make them valuable characters. What great things have the excellent regulations of the public prison in this city effected in this respect? They are regulations worthy to be imitated in all the United States, and through the whole world. How often do vices arise from false views of things, occasioned by the circumstances in which men are unavoidably placed, which therefore a more favourable situation, and better information, would easily cure. The natural operation of all punishment here is the reformation of the offender; and if human nature will continue to be the same thing that it now is, it must have the same operation hereafter, and the *time* that is often

often the only thing wanting to produce its proper effect at present, will not be wanting then.

Many vicious persons, and especially unbelievers, are men of great natural talents and powers, capable of the happiest exertions, if only well directed, and is their Maker incapable of giving them that due direction? After having made use of them for the wise and benevolent purposes of his providence here, in promoting, as they indirectly do, the virtue and happiness of others, will he cast them away, as of no further use? For, as I have observed, moral as well as natural evils are necessary in this state of trial and discipline. Would not any man be justly censured for destroying any animal that might be rendered useful, merely because he was vicious? Or would any parent abandon a child for any fault that he could be guilty of? It would be said that judicious treatment would cure those vices, whatever they were. And is the Divine Being less skillful, or less benevolent, than man?

Consider, farther, how is it possible for good men, to whom the happiness of

heaven is promised, to have any enjoyment of that happiness themselves, if those for whom they cannot but have the strongest affection, especially their children, and other near relations and friends, be, I do not say, consigned to everlasting torments, but even annihilated, or in any other way only excluded from all possibility of attaining such a state as will make their existence a blessing to them. If David lamented as he did the death of his rebellious son Absalom, what would he have felt in the idea of his utter destruction? A parent myself, allow me to speak to the feelings of others who are also parents. But is not God the true parent of us all? Are not our children as much his, as they are ours? And is an earthly parent, who is deserving of the name, incapable of wholly abandoning any of his children; and will God, whose *tender mercies are over all his works*, Psalm cxlv. 9. and whose love and compassion far exceeds ours, abandon any of his? Like a true parent, he will ever correct in *measure*, and with *mercy*.

I shall

I shall conclude with a quotation from *Dr. Hartley's Observations on Man*, in which the doctrine of the final happiness of all men is ably defended. It is the conclusion of his great work.

" I have now gone through with my *Observations on the frame, duty, and expectations of man*, finishing them with the doctrine of ultimate unlimited happiness to all. This doctrine if it be true, ought at once to dispel all gloominess, anxiety, and sorrow, from our hearts, and raise them to the highest pitch of love, adoration, and gratitude, towards God, our most bountiful creator, and merciful father, and the inexhaustible source of happiness and perfection. Here self interest, benevolence, and piety, all concur to move and exalt our affections. How happy in himself, how benevolent to others, and how thankful to God, ought that man to be who believes both himself and others born to an infinite expectation? Since God has bid us rejoice, what can make us sorrowful? Since he has created us for happiness what misery can we fear? If we be really intended for ultimate unlimited happiness, it is no matter to a truly resigned person *when, or where, or how*. Nay, could any of us fully conceive, and be duly influenced by this glorious expectation, this infinite balance in our favour, it would be sufficient to deprive all present evils of their sting and bitterness. It would be a sufficient answer to all our difficulties and anxieties, from the folly, vice, and misery, which we experience in ourselves, and see in others, to say that they will end in unbounded knowledge, virtue, and happiness; and that the progress of every individual, in his passage through an eternal life, is from imperfect to perfect, particular to general, less to greater, finite to infinite, and from the creature to the Creator."